

March 16, 2022

Dear Chairs Horn and Osten, Vice Chair Paolillo, Ranking Members Champagne and Howard, and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee,

My name is Sonjia Murray. I am a resident of Guilford and I'm writing in support of HB 5420, AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF AND SERVICES FOR POLICE OFFICERS, CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS REGARDING POLICE TRAINING AND CERTAIN REPORTS.

As awareness among mental health needs grows, so should access to this care for police officers whose occupation may directly expose them to trauma and the increased need of services. Mental health care services should not be subject to discrimination and resources for officers should be safely available. Police need support from experts in mental health as they respond on the front line to situations trying to keep everyone--themselves, others and a person with a mental health issue—safe.

Additionally, increased funding to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) is necessary to help support nonprofit organizations like the CT Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE) to expand Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for police officers. CIT training can make the difference in a better outcome when an officer responds to a situation involving mental health issues. CIT training can help officers to recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental health issue versus a true crime so they can respond accordingly. An important key to the training is to help officers understand what a mentally agitated person may be going through and develop more effective de-escalating strategies.

CABLE teaches the Memphis Model for CIT training. The Memphis Model practice guide recommends a CIT training coordinator as a key component to an infrastructure that supports an improved crisis response system. Police department CIT coordinators can act as liaison between all CIT partners, ensure adherence to policies, engage officers to participate in training as appropriate and provide ongoing mentoring. I support every department having a Crisis Intervention Team Coordinator to oversee CIT activity and help appropriately enroll officers into the training. CIT training is necessary for police officers to appropriately assess and interact with people who have emerging or existing mental illness. It is vital there is fair and just treatment for all.

In 2018, it was estimated that approximately 1,000 people in the United States were fatally shot by police officers, and people with mental illness were involved in approximately 25 percent of those fatalities¹. It is important the State of Connecticut serve as a leader in CIT with

¹ Effectiveness of Police Crisis Intervention Training Programs

Michael S. Rogers, Dale E. McNiel and Renée L. Binder

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its statewide police force. This 40 hour training could make the difference of a positive outcome when a situation involving mental health generates a response by the police.

I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of committee.

Sincerely,

Sonjia Murray
Guilford, CT